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Ch. Hoenig, *Plato's Timaeus and the Latin Tradition*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2018 (Cambridge Classical Studies), X + 331 pp..

A PhD dissertation at the University of Cambridge underpins this volume devoted to the reception of the *Timaeus* by Cicero, Apuleius, Calcidius, and Augustine. Hoenig examines "how these authors created new contexts and settings for the intellectual heritage they received and thereby contributed to the construction of the complex and multifaceted genre of Roman Platonism" (p. 9). They dealt with the *Timaeus* "in a variety of literary settings. The genres chosen by our authors are: translation intended as a part of a philosophical dialogue (Cicero), translation in combination with philosophical commentary (Calcidius), paraphrase, translation, moralizing lecture, and 'textbook' survey of Platonic doctrine (Apuleius), and the autobiographical, often polemical manifesto of Christian doctrine in the case of Augustine" (p. 12). Cicero, Apuleius, Calcidius, and Augustine are placed in a series, with the latter in a climactic position: "Among them, Augustine stands out since, unlike the others, he produced neither a translation of the *Timaeus*, nor longer stretches of recognizable paraphrase. Nevertheless, Augustine's treatment of the dialogue is a crucial witness to the confluence of various terminological and doctrinal features we encounter in Cicero and Apuleius, in particular. Precisely because Augustine could not rely on an extensive knowledge of Greek, these authors counted among the various Latin channels of transmission through which he accessed Platonic philosophy. In Augustine's engagement with the *Timaeus*, therefore, earlier influences come together, resulting in a striking exegetical synthesis" (p. 13). At first blush, this suggests that in addition to Cicero – with whom Augustine was well acquainted and to whose translation of the *Timaeus* he refers (details at p. 220 with n. 19) – and Apuleius – whose demonology he harshly criticizes (details at pp. 270-8) – Calcidius also counts among the sources of Augustine. In reality, as we shall see below, this is not what Hoenig thinks; she suspects rather that both Calcidius and Augustine depend on a common source or set of sources.

An informative and balanced chapter "The Setting: Plato's *Timaeus*" (pp. 14-37) paves the way for an examination of the "mesmerizingly complex reception" (p. 36) of this dialogue. On the issue of the literal vs the allegorical or 'didactical' interpretation of the narrative of the demiurgic deeds Hoenig decides for literalism, with the following *caveat*: "Weighing up the various interpretative difficulties that emerge in the dialogue, it appears that we ought to take *Timaeus* at his word in accepting that too close a scrutiny of some of the incongruities in the narrative is ill-advised. Had Plato intended for *Timaeus*' narrative to serve as a viable explanation of the reality, why did he write the dialogue in a manner that is, quite obviously, less than coherent? Would he not have allowed his protagonist to argue his case with more convincingness, even if the final truth must escape the mortal reader?" (p. 36).

Chapter 2, "Cicero" (pp. 38-101), opens with an outline of the recent discussions about the nature of Cicero's scepticism, followed by the examination of his translation method. Cicero's project for the Latinisation of philosophy is rooted in his early training in paraphrasing Greek works, as mentioned in the *De Oratore* and *De Optimo genere oratorum*. "The refinement of an orator's rhetorical style was not the only purpose Cicero attached to the practice of translation. A further aspect came to play a more relevant role in his later years as a writer of philosophy. For this project, the skills he had acquired in his rhetorical trainings proved an important instrument in the competition for cultural superiority with Greece he so passionately promoted. We encounter this sentiment in the preface to his *Tusculans* where Cicero explains his intention to illuminate the subject of philosophy *latinis litteris*" (p. 42). Instead of being accepted, the commonplace of the poverty of the Latin language is challenged. Hoenig comments upon the well-known preface of the *De Finibus*, where Cicero distinguishes between translation and interpretation. She suggests that the translation of the *Timaeus* might be a case in point for testing Cicero's "wider-reaching

project of proving that his native language was capable of reproducing the words even of Plato himself" (p. 44). Cicero's translation is partial – it runs from 26 D 6 to 47 B 2 – and Hoenig discusses the rationale behind this selection, coming to the conclusion that Cicero "transfers the Timaean creation account into the exclusive context of natural philosophy" (p. 47) against the backdrop of his own philosophical position. Hoenig is not convinced by the attempts at downgrading Cicero's allegiance to the probabilist Philonian Academy (p. 45, n. 33). Rather, she argues that "What we appear to have in the translation is a sceptical viewpoint on natural philosophy that appropriates the *Timaean* creation account on behalf of the Academy. (...) a sceptical outlook would oblige the speaker to present the contents of *Timaeus*' original as the 'most likely' account, from a probabilist viewpoint, thus eschewing a full doctrinal commitment to the cosmological views advanced" (p. 49, author's emphasis). The "sceptical investigative method" (p. 55) of the *disputatio in utramque partem* serves the philosophical purpose of presenting the cosmology of the *Timaeus* in a way which can be accepted as the most probable one according to the criteria of the Philonian Academy. Hoenig examines in this vein Cicero's rendition of the εἰκὼς λόγος which unfolds at *Tim*. 29 B 2 – D 3. "He describes the process of adapting one's argumentative method to the type of investigation at hand from the beginning (...). The *oratio* treating of subjects that are unstable and changing can attain no more than *similitudinem veri.* (...) The Platonic, in Timaeus' methodological manifesto at *Tim*. 29b2-d3, is identified by Cicero with the method of sceptical-rhetorical investigation. (...) The translation thus has the tone of a cosmological account of the type that would have been advanced by Philo's Academy, a position that advances *probabilia*, probable viewpoints that could, in turn, be opposed by the other interlocutors Cicero may have envisaged for his *Timaeus* project" (pp. 69-70). All in all, "A definite 'criterion of truth', *iudicium veritatis* – we note the legal connotations – could not exist in the sensible world. Instead, the sceptic philosopher must form a *iudicium* based on *coniectura*, relying on *verisimilia* that can, at best, provide *fides*. The individual viewpoints advanced in the Timaean creation account, according to Cicero's portrayal, would have been those found to be most persuasive in intra-Academic discussions *in utramque partem*" (p. 82). Note that in *De Nat. deor*. Cicero has Velleius putting forward strong arguments against the demiurgic activity in the *Timaeus*, and famously that of the *novum consilium*: why did the Demiurge decide, all of a sudden, to create the world after having been idle before? "Cicero's philosophical treatises thus bear witness to a polemical cluster of criticisms" (p. 92) to which "Cicero or another representative of the sceptical Academy would have responded critically" (p. 101).

With Chapter 3, "Apuleius" (pp. 102-59), Hoenig moves to the Second Sophistic and its typical interplay of literary genres. "Prone to literary embellishment and displays of learnedness, Apuleius certainly bears the hallmarks of this era. What is more, the intellectual milieu of Apuleius' second century CE is sometimes characterized by a domineering focus on, and veneration for, the past" (p. 103). This however should not prevent us from detecting Apuleius' "intelligent use of Platonic themes in the various literary settings he creates" (p. 104). Apuleius' "religious-dogmatic interpretation of Platonism" (p. 105, dealt with in greater detail at pp. 106-12) is described in relationship with "his *De Mundo*, his translation of the Ps.-Aristotelian treatise *Peri kosmou* on cosmology and theology", a point on which Hoenig elaborates more to expose "the manner in which Apuleius negotiates a doctrinal stance that aligns Platonic and Aristotelian material" (p. 106). Apuleius' attitude towards the cosmology of the *Timaeus* is presented chiefly in his *De Platone et eius dogmate*. Once again the methodological passage at *Tim*. 29 B 2 - D 3 which has been examined in the chapter on Cicero comes to the fore. "According to his [Apuleius'] explanation, accounts that pertain to the physical world are not reliable, but, instead, are the result of uncertain

teaching, *inconstanti disciplina* (...). Apuleius' choice of expression is perhaps symptomatic of how entrenched the dogmatic philosophical stance had become in his contemporary intellectual milieu. Even in the case of objects that, according to Timaeus' account, are cognitively unreliable due to their kinship with the physical world, their representation in word or letter still presents a teaching, a *disciplina*" (p. 129). On several counts this teaching proves to be akin to Aristotle's. After an interesting analysis of the way in which the dilemma about createdness vs perpetual existence of the cosmos is raised and solved, Hoenig remarks: "While one might consider the world's everlastingness as being entailed already by the fact that it was not itself created, i.e. in a temporal sense, but merely of the same genus as its components, which are subject to coming to be, Apuleius appears anxious not to leave any room for doubt on the matter and explains, in addition, that its everlastingness is owing to its ontological dependence upon the god. The thesis of an uncreated, everlasting universe is reiterated also in his translation of the *De Mundo*. The overall Aristotelian framework of this treatise poses no hindrance to his Platonic exegesis. Instead, with the help of several modifications in his translation, Apuleius injects Platonizing elements into this framework that allow him to align its contents with Plato, thereby recruiting Aristotle as a follower and a representative of Platonic cosmology and theology" (p. 132). The idea of divine providence permeating the cosmos through its omnipresent δύναμις that features in the Ps.-Aristotelian *De Mundo* is adapted to convey that of a toil-free creation, "care and continued maintenance of the cosmos" (p. 134). The supreme deity remains isolated in its transcendence and its nature cannot be expressed (p. 143). "Apuleius carefully adjusts his discussion of the highest god to the various contexts in which it appears. While the textbook *DPD* [i.e. *De Platone et eius dogmate*] provides a list of presumably standard characteristics associated with the highest god without further analysis, the *DDS* [i.e. *De Deo Socratis*], in which Apuleius imparts to his demonology a thoroughly ethical message, avoids a substantial discussion of the highest god, justifying such a programme by echoing *Timaeus*' cautious remarks at *Tim*. 28 C in the form of a dramatic profession of god's elusive sublimity" (p. 144). The transcendence of the supreme deity entails the *secunda providentia* of the intermediate cosmological principles, the *caelicolae*, and a third, intramundane kind of providence, a position occupied by the lowest divinities: the *daemones*. A hierarchical cosmos is set in place. "God's providence is passed on to the material sphere, received by the *caelicolae* and, ultimately, passed to demons, who fulfil their appointed tasks, and who share a material habitat. (...) the secondary providence, identified with fate, applies to the *caelicolae* and, by succession, to the demons whose specific task, in turn, is that of mediating between the higher and lower elemental races" (pp. 155-6). Hoenig is right when she concludes that Apuleius' agenda is "diametrically opposed to that of Cicero" (p. 159).

Calcidius is the subject-matter of Chapter 4 (pp. 160-214) which predictably opens with the mystery that surrounds both this thinker and the time of his activity. Despite past and recent attempts at narrowing the focus, "to pinpoint for Calcidius a precise date of composition within the fourth-century bracket remains speculative" (p. 161). On the contrary, the work itself is much better known than the author, due to the widespread medieval circulation of this partial translation-cum-commentary. "A large part of Calcidius' exegesis (...) appears to be Middle Platonic in character – says Hoenig – but the hypothesis of a predominantly Porphyrian influence has proven popular" (p. 163). After a survey of the relevant scholarship, she opts for the non-committal conclusion that "Calcidius was drawing from a running commentary on Plato's dialogue, as well as from shorter, thematical treatises by various sources" (p. 164). The scope of the translation is justly connected with the issue of the loss of the Graeco-Latin bilingualism that was destined to become so prominent a feature in the subsequent century, thus setting the scene for Boethius' enterprise.

"Plato's Greek text, the *exemplum*, is illuminated not only by a translation, its *simulacrum*, but, moreover, by the commentary or 'the unfolding of an interpretation', *explanatio interpretationis*. (...) the commentary takes on the role of a go-between that elucidates for the reader the relation between the Greek and Latin texts" (pp. 166-7), a feature that Calcidius' work shares with "the Latin philosophical commentaries of a similar date, as, for instance, in Macrobius' work on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*" (*ibid*.). Here again the interpretation of the εἰκὼς λόγος attracts Hoenig's attention. Calcidius' distinction between the *disputatio naturalis* and "the epoptical discussion" that 'flows out from the source of the purest knowledge of things" paves the way to the assignment of a "subordinate status to physics in relation to the subject of theology. (...) In contrast to a *disputatio epoptica*, which reveals true knowledge, it is a mere *mediocris explanatio* that possesses fleeting similarity to the former type of account" (p. 176). Calcidius sides with the non-temporal interpretation of the demiurgical deeds. Createdness and everlastingness do not contradict each other. This position entails allegiance to the 'didactic' interpretation of Plato's purpose. While in the case of things falling under coming-to-be and passing away the cause precedes chronologically its effects, when eternal items are considered the priority should be taken in terms of *dignitatis eminentia*. "Calcidius emphasizes once again Plato's purpose of guiding his audience with didactic concern as he sets out his doctrine (...). Calcidius thus accounts for Plato's description of the creation of everlasting objects in temporal terms by crediting him with an essentially pedagogical agenda" (p. 193). The chapter ends with an interesting analysis of Calcidius' ways of reconciling transcendence with providence. "Like Apuleius, Calcidius introduces a network of demonic powers and diverging levels of providence" (p. 194).

The last chapter, "Augustine" (pp. 215-79), opens with a survey of the main passages where Augustine accounts for his evaluation of Plato and the Academy. Then Hoenig narrows her focus to the *Timaeus*. It is firmly established in the scholarship that Augustine depends on Cicero's translation for his knowledge of the text (p. 227). Unsurprisingly, the main point for Augustine is the narrative of the fabrication of the cosmos by the Demiurge. It is well known, and Hoenig comments upon this in the introductory part of the chapter, that Augustine approaches Platonism by comparing the truths that feature in the books of the Platonists (*ibi legi*) with those which escaped them (*ibi non legi*). Creation belongs for him to the first set, and the *Timaeus* is the place where the Platonic version of this topic is accounted for. Hence Hoenig's plan to search for "the docrtinal parallels Augustine perceived between Christian dogma and Timaean doctrinal elements" (p. 227). That Augustine is aware of the challenge posited by the topic of the *novum consilium* dealt with in Cicero's *De Natura deorum* results from two passages of the *De Civitate Dei* discussed by Hoenig at pp. 227-30. On the one hand, Augustine is committed to the literal reading of the narrative in the *Timaeus*: the world had a temporal origin. This sits well with the Scriptures. On the other, he is well aware of the difficulty this entails, namely that of admitting that God "underwent a change in the transition from non-creating to creating" (p. 229). To avoid the alarming admission of a *novum iudicium* in an eternal God, Augustine embarks upon the argument that "the creation has been the creator's 'eternal will' ". Hoenig examines further passages where Augustine "reinforces his stance by arguing that the divinity abides in immutable eternity and that no temporal framework, including questions such as 'What was the creator doing before he created?' and no charge of a *novum consilium*, applies to the divine realm" (pp. 229-30). She sums up Augustine's treatment of eternity and time by saying that for him "God's immutable eternity is his very essence, no mere accidental property of the kind that time is to mutable objects" (p. 234). What requires further examination is, to my mind, the philosophical pattern that inspired Augustine. A book announcement is not the place where to discuss such a question, but a detailed comparison with Plotinus' III 7[45] would in

all likelihood show that this treatise was the main source of inspiration for Augustine, directly or indirectly.

This drives me to the question I mentioned at the beginning, when I quoted Hoenig's suggestion (p. 13) that, in addition to Cicero and Apuleius, Calcidius also "counted among the various Latin channels of transmission through which [Augustine] accessed Platonic philosophy". She is rightly cautious in considering the similarities with Calcidius as items of literary filiation, suggesting rather a common dependence upon one or more sources. Among them Philo of Alexandria seems to be her favourite. "The Augustinian creation theory leaves the overall impression of a patchwork of Greek philosophical and Judaeo-Christian dogma. We re-encounter the causal interpretation of γένεσις, a traditional component of Plato's successors proved and tested throughout the centuries. (...) The type of layered creation process we find in Augustine looks back on a rich exegetical tradition that, to judge from our extant sources, emerged in the first century CE. Philo of Alexandria appears to be one of its earliest proponents. His *De Opificio mundi*, which betrays the influence of Platonism, Stoics, and Neopythagoreanism, with an overall heavy dependence on the *Timaeus*, explains that a 'first' creation was the intelligible image of the creation-to-be, formed in the creator's mind. The creator formed the intelligible world so he would be able to create 'a newer cosmos, as the likeness of the former'. (...) The most important parallels to Augustine appear at Philo, *Opif. Mund*. 16-36, 69 and 134-5; the concept of a double creation that is structured through the order of the six 'days' emerge at 16-25. What is more, we find a reference to 'seeds' at Philo's *Opif. Mund.* 42-3" (p. 248).

One cannot but agree that Augustine echoes many elements of centuries of exegesis of the *Timaeus* both in the philosophical camp and in the religious literature, Jewish and Christian alike. However, on crucial topics such as the non-temporal status of divine eternity or that of divine causality, it seems to me that the dominant influence was that of Plotinus. Consider the following table, and compare Plotinus' interpretation of the seed metaphor and Augustine's.

Plot. V 1[10], 5.10-13; trans, A.-H. Armstrong, vol. V p. 27; Plot. IV 8[6], 6.7-10, trans. Armstrong, vol. IV, p. 415.	*De gen. ad litt.* 5.4.9, trans. Hoenig, p. 245 n. 95
For masses and magnitudes are not primary: these things which have thickness come afterwards, and sense-perception thinks they are realities. Even in seeds it is not the moisture which is honourable, but what is unseen: and this is number and rational principle (λόγος). (...) if this is in every nature, to produce what comes after it and to unfold itself as a seed does, from a partless beginning which proceeds to the final stage perceived by the senses (...).	Where then were the creatures prior to their coming into existence? Were they inside the earth itself, in the causes and reasons (*causaliter et rationaliter*), just as all things exist already in their seeds before they develop into whatever form and unfold their intrinsic nature through the course of time?

This is a rich and interesting book. Indeed, it is not difficult to endorse Hoenig's final remark that "Plato's *Timaeus* provides the foundation for the continuous intellectual discourse" (p. 280) that develops in the Imperial and late antique thought in Latin.

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